



**How recovering addicts avoid relapse** provides valuable clues to where interventions might focus. Interviews with 70 ex-addicts in Scotland (60% former heroin addicts, most previously in treatment) revealed the importance of constructing and defending a new non-addict identity, but also how difficult this is. The fact that relapse is the norm is usually attributed to the psychological or biochemical grip of addiction. The research reframes this as a function of social and economic obstacles to lifestyle change which affect us all, and which impede breaks with the past clean and satisfying enough to prevent slip-page. For addicts these changes are the more difficult due to the years when social and economic capital was invested in drugtaking rather than in preparation for work or engagement with non-drug activities and social networks. Addicts spoke of the importance of rehousing away from former drugtaking associates and of paid work to establish a new positive identity, to occupy time, and to create a stake in society to which they can hold to stop sliding back. In the absence of these opportunities, fallback strategies such as simply not going out or unpaid work and work round the house can sustain recovery. Their tactics amounted partly to creating a gap between themselves and their drugtaking past and then filling this with roles and relationships which created rewards, which in turn stiffened their resolve not to relapse – a positive feedback cycle in some ways the reverse of the addictive cycle of drug use narrowing the ability to gain alternative rewards leading to diminished ability to break free from drug use.

**Featured studies** McIntosh J., *et al.* "The recovery from dependent drug use: addicts' strategies for reducing the risk of relapse." *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy*: 2000, 7(2), p. 179–192.

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